

“WHO WANTS TO BE PRESIDENT WHEN YOU CAN BE MAYOR?”

Career patterns of local politicians

THE CASE OF METROPOLITAN MAYORS

Local government is emerging as a strong third sphere of government. Within local government, metropolitan cities are coming out as powerful institutions. Meanwhile, the discussion on the role of provincial governments is raging.

Instead of looking at constitutional or managerial aspects of local and provincial governments, this article looks at the impact of the emergence of local government on the career patterns of politicians. How have political parties reacted to this new sphere of government in terms of their politicians' career management? What does this say about the role, function and importance of the three levels of government in South Africa? An overview of the history of metropolitan

mayors and their profiles, albeit very limited in timespan and scope, reveals some interesting career patterns.

The movement of political representatives: Some examples

It is important to note that, prior to the 2000 local government elections, local government generally did not wield significant power. Positions in local government were therefore unattractive for politicians with an already established career in provincial or national politics.

From national or provincial to local

Johannesburg

The current mayor of Johannesburg, Cllr Amos Masondo, is an example of a provincial politician who moved to local government. Before his entry into local government he was a member of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature.



Amos Masondo, Executive Mayor of Johannesburg



Helen Zille, Executive Mayor of Cape Town

Cape Town

Cape Town has seen a flurry of shifts and mayoral changes in the last six years. It has had four mayors since December 2000. Its first mayor was Mr Peter Marais, whose entry into Cape Town was a move from the provincial executive to a municipal council: he was Minister for Social Services and Poverty Relief in the Western Cape Cabinet until he was elected as mayor of Cape Town in 2000. The then-Premier of the Western Cape, Mr. Gerald Morkel, succeeded Mr. Marais as mayor of Cape Town, again a move from the provincial executive to a municipal council.

In 2002, floor crossers divested Mr. Morkel's Democratic Alliance (DA) of its majority and handed it to the African National Congress-New National Party (ANC-NNP) alliance, which elected Ms Nomaindia Mfeketo as mayor of Cape Town. Ms Mfeketo had been mayor before 2000 and was brought back into local government from the private sector.

The 2006 elections once again brought in a former provincial executive member. The DA-led coalition elected the DA's candidate, Cllr Helen Zille, as mayor. Zille is the former Minister of Health in the Western Cape Cabinet and a former member of the National Assembly. Her entry into Cape Town politics thus again represents a move from the provincial executive and National Assembly to a municipal council.

Ekurhuleni (East Rand)

Ekurhuleni's mayor in both the 2000-2006 and the current term, Cllr Duma Nkosi, was a senior Member of Parliament before he became mayor.

key points

- It appears that local government, specifically its six strong metropolitan municipalities, is claiming its space in the political realm.
- Local government's strong institutional status, its substantial revenue generating powers and its six unities, have propelled it into 'serious politics'.
- This indicates that local government is becoming an increasingly attractive destination for politicians in South Africa.

Tshwane

Father Smangaliso Mkhathswa was the first executive mayor of Tshwane. Before he stood for election as councillor and mayor of Tshwane in 2000, he served in the national Cabinet as Deputy Minister for Education. Father Mkhathswa's entry into the Tshwane City Council was thus a move from the National Executive to a municipal council.

After the ANC secured a landslide victory in the Tshwane City Council during the 2006 elections, the former Gauteng Provincial Minister for Health, Dr Gwen Ramokgopa, was elected as executive mayor of Tshwane. The recent leadership change in Tshwane is thus the fourth example of a move by a provincial executive to a municipal council.



Duma Nkosi, Executive Mayor of Ekurhuleni



Gwen Ramokgopa, Executive Mayor of Tshwane

From local to local

Ethekwini (Durban)

Ethekwini has been led by Cllr Obed Mlaba since 2000. Cllr Mlaba was recruited for the mayoral position from within the City Council and had been a councillor in the transitional city structures prior to the 2000 elections.

Nelson Mandela Bay Metro (Port Elizabeth)

Nelson Mandela Bay Metro is another in this list whose mayors have not come from national or provincial government. Its first mayor, Mr Nceba Faku, was mayor and councillor before he assumed office in 2000.

His successor, Cllr Nondumiso Maphazi, was recruited from within the municipal council. She was also a councillor.

From local to provincial

As recalled above, the then-Premier of the Western Cape, Mr. Gerald Morkel succeeded Mr. Marais and took up the position as mayor of Cape Town. In an ironic twist of events, Mr Peter Marais emerged as the new Premier of the Western Cape. This thus amounted to a metropolitan mayor moving up to become a member of a provincial executive. The turn of events in Cape Town meant, in effect, that the mayor of Cape Town and the Premier of the Western Cape had 'swapped' positions.

From national to provincial?

A review of the positions held by the members of provincial executives prior to their entry into provincial executive



Nomdumiso Maphazi, Executive Mayor of Nelson Mandela Bay

reveals a number of interesting patterns. For example, no members of provincial executives came from the national executive. Provincial ministers sometimes came out of the ranks of the National Assembly but no MEC or Premier has come from the national executive.

Assessment

This overview, albeit very limited in its timespan and scope, gives some indication of the impact of the emergence of a new system of local government on the South African polity. Of the 11 mayors that have served, or are serving, in one of the metropolitan municipalities:

- three came from the provincial executive;
- one came from the provincial parliament;
- one came from the national executive;
- two came from the national parliament; and
- four came from within the municipal council.

This shows that the mayoral positions of metropolitan municipalities are attractive positions for career politicians. A move from the national or provincial executive or parliament to a metropolitan municipality is not necessarily a demotion in party political terms. On the contrary, political parties elect strong provincial executives to be moved to metropolitan local level. A move from the provincial executive level to local government is common and even a move from the national executive to local government was recorded. Yet, a move from the national executive level to the provincial executive could not be found.

What does this indicate? It appears that local government, specifically its six strong metropolitan municipalities, is claiming its space in the political realm. Local government's strong institutional status, its substantial revenue generating powers and its six unicities, have propelled it into 'serious politics'. Fiorello La Guardia, New York City mayor in the 1930s, asked the question: "Who wants to be President when you can be mayor of the city?" It would seem that the emergence of a strong level of local government with powerful metropolitan cities has resulted, to some extent, in these words ringing true for South African politics.